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How to Get a Free WordPress Website

This guide, updated in February 2020, is designed to help you to set up, build and run a free website using WordPress.

You don't require any web design skills. What's more, you can easily get your business online and get found quickly thanks to the power of WordPress.

You'll discover:

- Why over a third of UK small and medium sized businesses still don't have a website

- Why WordPress is the smart choice for your first website

- What the difference is between **WordPress.com** and **WordPress.org**

- How to build a professional free website with WordPress.com

- How to drive traffic to your site and grow your business

- A case study of how one small business benefited from its free website

If you are a small to medium sized business, or even an individual, who needs a website for brand recognition or to drive sales, it really is time to get online. It's easier than you may think!

Why Don't You Already Have a Website?

According to the latest data from Statistica, 84% of all UK companies have a website. Unsurprisingly, this is rising year on year. However, this does mean that over 2 million companies in the UK still don't have a website.

Most of these are small organisations employing less than 5 people. Often owner-managed by people over the age of 50 who have been in business for more than 5 years.

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So, why are so many businesses still without websites?

There are 3 key reasons:

• Business owners say their business is too small to warrant a website

• Business owners don't have the time or expertise to build a website

• Business owners believe websites are too costly

This betrays a lack of understanding of the positive impact that a website has for any business, no matter how small and no matter how well established.

Moreover, the difficulty and costs of going online are still being vastly overestimated.

In 2020, a business without an online presence is a business without a future.

Why Choose a WordPress Website?

When you decide to build a website (or have it built for you), you must choose a Content Management System (CMS).

Your CMS is used for you to add text, photos, videos, and links to other sites. Your CMS also governs how your information is displayed on your website.

Therefore, you want a Content Management System that's easy to use and produces stunning websites. You will see many free website builders such as Wix and Weebly.

You could go for this as your starter option but if you do this, please bear in mind that you may end up with a template website that looks like every other small business in your industry.

You may also have limited ability to customise, upgrade or expand your site.

In my experience WordPress is a far better option.

What makes WordPress such a good choice for your first website?

• WordPress is very easy to use, is free and comes with an enormous number of premium quality free themes

• WordPress is easy to customise and to update

• WordPress has a built-in blog

• WordPress has a block editor which helps you create content quickly

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- WordPress allows you to easily structure and link your content

- WordPress has excellent search engine optimisation. This will help to get your new website found online more quickly

Some facts on WordPress

Did you know?

- WordPress powers 35% of the world's websites

- WordPress is the most commonly used CMS for websites

- Some of the world's most popular websites including Spotify and CNN run on WordPress

- 500 new WordPress websites are being launched every day

- Over 400 million people view over 20 billion web pages every month on WordPress

- 70 million new pieces of web content are uploaded every month onto WordPress websites

- 17 posts are published every second on WordPress sites around the world

By choosing WordPress, you will be in good company.

WordPress.org vs. WordPress.com

To get a WordPress website you can either opt for WordPress.com or WordPress.org

What is the difference?

In summary:

WordPress.com provides you with a free WordPress.com domain, free hosting, free security and free updates.

That's great isn't it?

So why, would you go for WordPress.org?

The reason is that WordPress.org allows you to build a site on your own registered domain, choose where you host it and make it absolutely unique to your business and your brand.

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WordPress.org Website Set-up

If you decide on WordPress.org, unless you have coding skills, you will need expert support from a web designer or digital agency.

They will:

- Download a copy of the latest version of WordPress

- Offer to host your site or find an external hosting company to house your WordPress site

- Help you source your own domain name if you don't have already one

- Choose a theme and build your site

- Customise your site and manage all updates

- Add additional functionality through the thousands of WordPress plug-ins available for free or at a cost.

If you opt for WordPress.org you will have ultimate flexibility.

If, on the other hand, you are looking for a simple plug and play website with powerful features already built-in and on-going automatic upgrades, then you should consider WordPress.com as your default option.

WordPress.com hosts your own website for free on its secure servers.

You simply sign up and choose your website name. Please bear in mind that your website name using the free package will always be name@wordpress.com

You then choose a theme and design your site within the limitations of the theme. The advantages of WordPress.com for a first-time website are as follows:

- It costs nothing to set up or host your site

- All site maintenance, updates, backups and search engine optimisation are automatic

- You get high quality site security and anti-spam protection

- All WordPress.com sites are fully responsive (i.e. they resize to display correctly on any device) and are therefore mobile-friendly for ease of use with Smartphones

- If you use the built-in blog, you can generate extra traffic by using WordPress tags

- You can upgrade from your free beginner plan at any time to access more powerful features

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- If, in future, you choose to move to WordPress.org and a self-hosted solution you can easily move your existing WordPress.com content over to your new site

Please be aware that by choosing the WordPress.com free plan you may find that your website occasionally has ads displayed on it.

However, you can move to a paid plan to remove these. WordPress.com paid plans also include enhanced functionality such as custom domain names, Google Analytics and even full e-commerce functionality.

As at the time of writing, WordPress.com offers the follows plans:

Free   £0 per month

Personal   £3 per month

Premium   £7 per month

Business   £20 per month

Ecommerce   £36 per month

For more information please see the official WordPress.com website

Building Your WordPress.Com Website

One of the great things about WordPress.com is that setting up your website is extremely easy.

Originally, designed for bloggers who wanted to quickly get online and get sharing, WordPress.com has an intuitive interface that makes customising themes and adding your own unique features very straightforward.

You do not need a web designer. You can create a professional website in a few hours.

Recently WordPress have updated the set-up process to make it even simpler to get started.

Simply go to https://wordpress.com/create/ and follow 6 simple steps to getting a free site:

1.   Choose site type: Blog, business or professional (e-commerce requires you to purchase a plan)

2.   Choose your category

3.   Choose your business name

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4.   Add your desired domain name (name@wordpress.com is free)

5.   Start with the free site or upgrade to one of the paying plans shown above

6.   Instantly, WordPress.com creates the outline of your site

Now you are able to change the layout and the look and feel of your site without having to do any coding at all!

The interface is very easy to use, and you can preview changes before implementing them. You can also experiment, undo, redo and so forth until you are truly happy with your site.

Here are some things that you should consider doing as you build your site:

1.   Customise your theme. Depending on the theme you can change background effects, colours on headers, add custom images and a variety of widgets.

2.   Give your website its identity. You do this in the customizer by entering a title, a tagline and a logo. Please note that this information will appear in search results.

3.   Ensure you have enabled "static front page" for your Home Page otherwise your blog page will be the home page.

4.   Create a custom menu. You do this by clicking on "My sites" in the navigation bar and going to "menus". Creating a custom menu allows you to control the way that pages appear on your site and how they are physically linked including the option to create subpages accessible through a "drop-down list" below the main page.

5.   Add links within your site and to other sites. Anchor links are easy to insert into your pages and these - along with your custom menu - help visitors to easily navigate through your site. Be sure to add links to your social media pages as well.

6.   Note that WordPress has 2 types of pages. "Pages" which are standard webpages and also "Posts". These are very similar from an editing point of view but bear in mind that they serve different purposes.

7.   Upload images to your posts and pages. To do this upload images as JPEGs or PNGs from your computer into your website's media library. From here you can insert images into your pages or set them as feature images which appear at the top of your page or in the banner depending on your theme type.

8.   Drop in sharing buttons. You do this by clicking on "My sites" in the navigation bar and going to "sharing". Simply select the social sharing buttons you want and voila your visitors can share your page or your blog on all the main social media platforms.

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Once you have everything as you need it, hit launch site and your new site will go live.

If all of this seems a little daunting, please don't worry it really is simple even for a novice.

If you'd like a step by step online video guide with screen shots, please click this website link on the official WordPress support website.

Driving Business Via Your Website

So now that you have set up your free WordPress.com website, how do you use it to drive business?

There are 3 key areas to concentrate on. These are:

- Website Content

- Website Updates

- Website Promotion Let's look at each of these in turn

Website Content

Ask yourself the following questions:

- "What is my website for?"

- "What value should it give to my visitors?"

- "What do I expect them to do after visiting my website?"

Answering these questions, enables you to build the type of content that will appeal to your potential customers giving them a reason to stay on your site and to interact with you and your company offline.

Some Do's and Don'ts

DO Make sure your content is high quality

DO Make sure that written content is free from typographical and grammatical errors

DO Make your information easy to find and easy to read

Remember: A picture speaks a thousand words so do ensure that your website is highly visual and the images you use are unique.

DO show images of you, your premises and your products.

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DON'T use stock shots, composite images or, heaven forbid, clipart

DON'T forget to include video. This is especially important for businesses that need to show a product in action or those that need testimonials from real life customers to encourage others to take the plunge.

Finally, make sure that your website has clear calls to action on every page and don't bury your contact information on a single page only.

Website Updates

In the past, websites for small businesses were little more than a static business overview or an outdated brochure online.

Today, your website is the heart of your online presence.

<u>Your business doesn't stand still, and neither should your website</u>. Therefore, every week you should be adding new content to your site with the aim of generating new and repeat visitors.

Search engines like Google value new content highly. So, what sort of content can you add?

Here are some ideas:

- New photos and videos

- New customer testimonials

- Employee profiles

- Information on upcoming events such as product launches and exhibitions

- New blog posts

- Links to other websites

- Hints and tips

- FAQs

- Awards

Website Promotion

Your website is there to promote your business. For it to this job effectively, you must first promote your website.

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Attracting traffic to a new website can be challenging. However, there are a number of tried and tested technique that you can use for free.

Here are 6 steps to get visitors to your site.

1. **Directory listings** - There are numerous business directories that will list your business and its website for free. Individuals and businesses searching these directories online simply click a link to come straight through to your website. You simply must list on Google My Business, Bing Places, Yahoo Local and Yell

3. **Social Media links** – Make sure that there are links between your website and your social media pages such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Importantly, do ensure that you host information on your website that calls to action on your social media pages can point to.

4. **Commenting on blogs and forums** – If you use forums like Quora or participate in LinkedIn groups or Facebook communities you can include the link to your website in your comment or in your signature. Do make sure your comments are not spammy or overly promotional though.

5. **Your Email Signature** - Every email you send should have a standard footer that describes you. It usually has a name, title and contact details. It should also have your website spelled out with http so it looks like http://www.yourlink.com This will be visible in text-based web mail browsers and gives you a live hyperlink in most email programs. Emails get forwarded, copied, and otherwise shared. You don't know who is reading and clicking.

6. **Emailing your customers and prospects** – Assuming you already have an email contact list, you should send a brief email inviting them to visit your site. This works best if you have a website only offer or if there is something that you can give away for free as a download from your site.

Case Study of a WordPress.com Site

Feet First Reflexology is a micro business which offers complementary health treatments. It went online using an entirely free website powered by WordPress.com.

It needed a website to raise awareness of the benefits of reflexology, to showcase its studio and its relaxing environment and to demonstrate using video how reflexology works and what prospective customers could expect from a treatment.

It selected the site address feetfirstreflexology.wordpress.com and the free theme Twenty Ten. It used customized menus to enable quick and easy navigation of the site.

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It added images, videos and SlideShares to give visitors a clear impression of the treatments on offer and the unique experience and expertise of the owner.

This was backed up with links to Facebook containing customer reviews as well as a comprehensive listing on Google My Business.

It used a news page to showcase upcoming events and new promotions.

It included an online contact page for enquiries and built-in Google maps so that potential customers could get driving directions to the business location.

All of these features were built-in to the free version of WordPress.com.

The owner of the business continually created new content and publicized this through posts on her business Facebook page. She also highlighted reviews as they came in through Google and Facebook.

3 years on from website launch, Feet First Reflexology has gone from being a start-up with few customers and no online presence, to a firmly established company with a growing reputation and a growing client list.

This website ranks on the first page of Google for relevant local searches. Each month it receives over one hundred unique visitors and generates several new enquires every single week.

From being on the free plan, the business has moved onto a business plan.

The benefits are:

- A shorter, custom domain name feetfirstreflexology.org

- Access to Google Analytics enabling a better understanding of where traffic comes from and how visitors navigate through the site

- The site continues on its launch theme, hosted securely and automatically updated by WordPress.com

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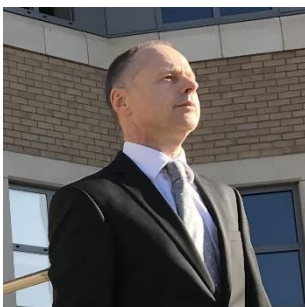
About the Author

Chris Dunn is passionate about the power of digital transformation and customer experience to create brand value, customer loyalty and competitive advantage.

His career stretches back 35 years during which time he has developed fast growing, profitable businesses serving B2B and B2C markets in the UK and internationally.

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His company Chris Dunn Consulting Services Limited provides business coaching and management consultancy to companies to help them drive change management and business development.

Chris is a long-standing mentor on the Cambridge Venture Project run by the Cambridge Judge Business School.

He writes a regular blog to pass on business advice as well as posting handy hints and tips through regular posts on LinkedIn and Facebook.

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